



HEALTHY BUSINESS | A CNBC SPECIAL REPORT

Skin Cancer Thrives as Tanning Culture Survives

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On sunny days, **Dr. Brad Merritt** has watched on the sidelines of his son's sporting events from the shade of his umbrella. The 37-year-old dermatologist, who already has had basal cell skin cancer on his face, is determined to protect himself from the sun.



"Is there any such thing as a safe tan?" asked Merritt, assistant professor of dermatology at the University of North Carolina. "The answer is, 'There is not.'"

"Though we're trying harder than ever, there's a little bit of a deaf-ear effect," said Dr. David Bank, spokesman for the **Skin Cancer Foundation** and assistant clinical professor at Columbia University-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York.

Despite the death rate, melanoma is "theoretically, 100 percent curable" if people would at least get annual skin checks and catch it early, he said.

Bank cited recent research from the **Mayo Clinic** showing that from 1970 to 2009, melanoma incidence increased eightfold among young Minnesota women ages 18 to 39 and fourfold among young men.

The increase may be linked in part to greater awareness and detection as many more people now visit dermatologists and more physicians in other specialties refer patients, Bank said.

"I think there's been a whole constellation of reasons why those numbers are there," and it will take more time to ferret out whether there's a greater prevalence of the disease itself and not just wider diagnosis, Bank said.